WARRIOR RIVER, LOCK NO. 3 WALL
(University Park Fishing Pier)
Birmingham Industrial District
River Rd. at University Park
Tuscaloosa
Tuscaloosa County
Alabama

HAER No. AL-43



PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

ADDENDUM TO
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS

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ADDENDUM TO
WARRIOR RIVER LOCK NO. 3 WALL
(University Park Fishing Pier)

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Location: Warrior River Old Locks, Dams and Quarries-Tuscaloosa are located along River Road and the Black Warrior River extending from University Park on the east to River Bend Park on the west, Tuscaloosa, Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. Lock No. 3 (later No. 12), is located 1/4 miles upstream from No. 2 in the University of Alabama's University Park.

Ownership: University of Alabama, City of Tuscaloosa, Tuscaloosa County, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Date of Construction: 1888-1898

Builder/Architect/ Engineer: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, William Powell, Major of Engineers

Project Information: This report is based on written documentation donated by the Birmingham Historical Society, reformatted to HABS/HAER guidelines.

Condition: Portions of the locks and dams are submerged to varying degrees due to fluctuations in water level of the river. Lock No. 3, the best preserved, forms the centerpiece of University Park, where it is used as a fishing pier. The lock walls are in danger of falling into the river.

Significance: The Warrior River lock, dam and quarry sites along the Tuscaloosa riverfront constitute the best surviving remains of an extensive system of locks and dams that opened river transportation for the Birmingham District by creating the longest, channelized waterway in the world at time of its construction. These locks mark the efforts to create a commercial waterway through the Birmingham District to link it to southern ports and international markets. The massive engineering work represents the union of federal and commercial interests.

DESCRIPTION

Located in a series of riverfront parks and wooded areas extending for a mile along the southern bank of the Black Warrior River are portions of the locks walls and guide cribs for the original Locks and Dams No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3, and evidence of stone cutting from the river bottom and adjacent hillside quarries (originally River Bed and Bank Quarries). The entire bank wall at the No. 3 Lock and Dam, a 380′ x 49′ x 20′ structure constructed of sandstone blocks 4′ x 5′ x 1′ is located at University Park and currently used as a fishing pier. The Bank Quarry extending for .3 miles along both sides of River Road, just south of Lock No. 3, showcases clearly visible cuts. Other lock walls, dams and the River Bed Quarry operation, submerged due to construction of the current locks and dams, are clearly visible during low water levels along the river. Iron and stone staircases lead from embankments to the structures.

Lock No. 1 (later No. 10), located near the shop of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, across from the Tuscaloosa Library, on River Road, is submerged, although the original rock dam is clearly visible.

Lock No. 2 (later No. 11), is located 1/4 mile upstream from No. 1. Guide cribs, made of timber boxes filled with stone, placed above and below the locks to absorb the shock of boats and barges and to help guide them in and out of the locks, can still be seen. The lock wall remains about one foot above the water line. Foundations to the lock tender houses, only recently demolished, and the plans remain.

Lock No. 3 (later No. 12), is located 1/4 miles upstream from No. 2 in the University of Alabama's University Park. The south lock wall is used as a fishing pier.

Bank Quarry is located just east of Lock No. 3 on the southside of River Road, across from River Road Park East. The old cuts in the bank are clearly visible from the road.

River Bed Quarry, just west of University Park, the island quarry is visible in the bed of the river.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The 19 original locks and dams along the Warrior and Black Warrior Rivers were authorized by a series of Congressional acts beginning in 1871 and constructed from 1888 to 1917. The Tuscaloosa Locks and Dams were under construction from 1888 to 1898. At their completion, the 455-mile Warrior River system was said to be the longest channelized waterway in the world. The current system, containing six locks and dams completed from 1954 through 1991, replaced and partially flooded the original locks and dams.

Tuscaloosa, the early capital of the state (1826-1846) was located on the Warrior River at its early head of navigation. Its location made it a regional shipping center for the entire northern Alabama region. Beginning in the 1830s, coal was transported here from surrounding areas and the Warrior coal fields for shipment to the port of Mobile. However, due to abundant shoals, transportation was dangerous and strictly one-way. While steamboats and paddle wheel operations traveled the more navigable portions of the river below Tuscaloosa, flatboats were the most popular means of river transport. Upon reaching Mobile and disposing of their cargoes, usually coal, the flatboats themselves were dismantled and sold for lumber.

State geologist Eugene Allen Smith's study of the obstructions to navigation and natural resources of the land adjacent to the river, (principally coal) completed in 1879, was instrumental in attracting federal investment. In the late 1880s and 1890s, U. S. Congressman John Hollis Bankhead from Jasper, located in the heart of the coal fields, successfully championed the cause at the Congressional level to construct the locks and dams.

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